

The Imjin War

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It was the year known in Korea as *Imjin*, "water-dragon," 1592 by the calendars of the West. A dense mist hung over the sea off the southern port of Pusan on the morning of May 23, obscuring any sign of activity offshore. Chong Pal, the sixty-year-old commander of the Pusan garrison, left the port early for a day of deer hunting on a nearby island. Emerging from the trees some time in the afternoon, he was the first to sight the danger: a line of ships low on the horizon, approaching from the south. Suspecting that this could be the Japanese invasion that some had been warning of for more than a year, Chong rushed back to Pusan to raise the alarm. By nightfall 400 vessels crowded the harbor, and the Koreans inside Pusan Castle were asking themselves: why had they come?¹⁾

The answer lay 250 kilometers to the southeast, at invasion headquarters on the coast of Kyushu. It was here that Japanese dictator Toyotomi Hideyoshi had amassed his titanic invasion force: 158,800 men earmarked to cross to Korea, plus another 76,200 to protect his headquarters from possible counterattack.

In physical appearance Hideyoshi was unimpressive: aging, wizened, in declining health, probably no more than one hundred pounds and five feet tall. As a conqueror, however, he was a giant. He had been born in 1537, the son of a farmer in the vicinity of present-day Nagoya. He lived at a time known as *Sengoku*, more than a century of civil war when Japan was divided between rival warlords. Hideyoshi's father served part-time in the army of the Oda house, which possessed the region where he lived. When Hideyoshi was old enough, he too entered the service of the Oda, first as a common soldier, then quickly rising to become a top commander and vassal.

In 1582 the head of the Oda house, Oda Nobunaga, was slain in an uprising by one of his vassals. Hideyoshi instantly avenged the disloyalty, laying the head of the rebel before Nobunaga's corpse just days after the event. Then he seized the Oda domain for himself, approximately one third of the landmass of Japan. It would take the farm boy from Nakamura village, nicknamed "Monkey" and "Bald Rat" by Nobunaga, just nine years to conquer the rest of the country. Then, in

1) Yu Song-nyong, *Chingbirok* ("Book of Corrections") (Seoul: Myongmundang, 1987), p. 50; *Sonjo sillok* ("Annals of King Sonjo"), 13/4/Sonjo 25 (May 23, 1592). (*Chingbirok* was written by Yu Song-nyong, the Prime Minister of Korea, circa 1602; the 42 volumes of *Sonjo sillok* were compiled in 1609-1616.)

1592, he set out to extend his conquests overseas. The idea had been in his mind for several years. As he explained in a letter to his wife in 1589, "By fast ships I have dispatched [orders] to Korea, to serve the throne of Japan. Should [Korea] fail to serve [our throne], I have dispatched [the message] that I will punish [that country] next year. Even China will enter my grip; I will command it during my lifetime."²)

Hideyoshi thought he could conquer China because he believed it was weak, and in this he was not entirely mistaken. In the late sixteenth century Ming China was weak, with nowhere near the two million men under arms recorded in the outdated military rosters in Beijing. In reality it was having difficulty scraping together even 100,000 men to deal with an endless parade of threats: Mongol incursions across the Great Wall, rebellious Jurchen tribesmen in the east, pirate raids along the coast, trouble with its vassal Burma.³) As for Hideyoshi, he possessed the most powerful army that then existed in the world, a quarter-million men and more, battle hardened, superbly armed and led, the Darwinian end product of more than one hundred years of civil war. By way of comparison, the Spanish armada that attacked England a few years before consisted of roughly 30,000 men; the entire army of Queen Elizabeth I was not much more than 20,000. Had he been able to transport his forces to Europe, Hideyoshi could have ground them both into dust.

Starting on May 23, 1592, this is what he would do to the Koreans. It was the first contingent of Hideyoshi's invasion force that arrived at Pusan that day, 18,700 men under Konishi Yukinaga. They remained aboard their vessels on through the night. Then, at 4:00 the next morning, the landings began. As the Koreans inside Pusan Castle watched this fearsome army march their way, garrison commander Chong Pal turned to his men and cried out: "I expect all of you to fight and die bravely! If any man attempts to flee, I will personally cut off his head!"

The ensuing battle was fierce but short, providing the Koreans with their first taste of the stunning power of the musket. The defenders of Pusan were felled by the hundreds by the flying slugs of lead that these strange "dog legs" spit out, a deluge of death that "fell like rain." The garrison fought until all their arrows were gone. Then Chong Pal himself was killed, and with that, at around nine o'clock in the morning, all resistance ceased.⁴)

2) Mary Elizabeth Berry, *Hideyoshi* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 91.

3) For more on Ming China's military weakness in the late 16th century, see Ray Huang, *1587. A Year of No Significance: The Ming Dynasty in Decline* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981); and Albert Chan, *The Glory and Fall of the Ming Dynasty* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982).

4) Min Jong-jung, *Nobong-chip*, in Yi Nae-ok et. al., eds., *Saryoro bonun imjin waeran* (Seoul:

Upon entering the fortress, "[w]e found people running all over the place and trying to hide in the gaps between the houses," samurai chronicler Yoshino Jingozaemon would later record. "Those who could not conceal themselves went off towards the East Gate, where they clasped their hands together, and there came to our ears the Chinese expression, 'Manō! Manō!', which was probably them asking for mercy. Taking no notice of what they heard our troops rushed forward and cut them down, slaughtering them as a blood sacrifice to the god of war..."⁵⁾ Among the dead was Chong Pal's eighteen-year-old concubine, Ae-hyang. Her body was found lying beside the fallen commander. She had taken her own life.

In the days that followed, two additional units arrived at Pusan: the 22,800-man second contingent under Kato Kiyomasa, and Kuroda Nagamasa's 11,000-man third. Konishi's first contingent had already departed for the Korean capital of Seoul, traveling up the center of the peninsula. Kato, chagrined at the prospect of being beaten to the prize, began racing up his own pre-assigned eastern route. Kuroda followed to the west. The three contingents moved with such speed that the Koreans were scarcely able to position their forces before being overrun.

The most significant stand the Koreans made was at Chungju, halfway between Pusan and Seoul, on the northern border of Kyongsang Province. General Sin Ip, sent down from Seoul to stop the enemy advance, managed to assemble an 8,000-man army, mainly officers and soldiers who had evacuated the south, augmented by units that Sin himself had led down from Seoul. Sin's original intention was to position this force at Choryong Pass to the south of the city, where the rocky terrain and the narrowness of the pass would work to his advantage. He changed his mind upon receiving word of the annihilation of General Yi Il's small army at Sangju, less than 100 kilometers to the south. With Sangju fallen and the Japanese already nearing Choryong, General Sin decided to remain at Chungju. One of his lieutenants urged him to take up a position in the surrounding hills, but Sin brushed the advice aside. "Our cavalry is useless in the rough terrain of the hills," he replied. "So we must make our stand here, in the field."⁶⁾

At midday on June 6, as the Japanese were descending the mountain road from Choryong and drawing near Chungju, General Sin Ip accordingly arrayed his forces outside the town on a stretch of flat ground beside a hill called Tangumdae. In hindsight it seems a dreadful choice, a deathtrap offering no chance of retreat, hemmed in by the South Han River behind and Tangumdae hill to the right. Sin

Hye-an, 1999), pp. 39-40; Homer Hulbert, *Hulbert's History of Korea* (New York: Hillary House Publishers, 1962), vol. 1, pp. 351-352.

5) *Yoshino Jingozaemon oboegaki*, in *Zoku gunsho ruiju*, quoted in Turnbull, p. 51. That it was assumed Koreans spoke Chinese is an indication of how little the Japanese knew of their foe.

6) *Sonjo sujong sillok*, vol. 3, pp. 238-239, 4/Sonjo 25 (May 1592).

has been generally reviled ever since for choosing to make his stand here. His decision is regarded as a fatal symptom of his overconfidence, and of his misguided determination to use his much-vaunted cavalry units. Perhaps so. There is, however, another dimension to the Battle of Chungju that needs to be understood before Sin Ip's measure can be fairly taken.

That Tangumdae offered no possibility of retreat would not have been lost on General Sin. Indeed, this may have been why he chose it. Placing troops in a hopeless situation with no avenue of escape was a long-established Chinese strategy which had over the millennia resulted in a number of victories against seemingly insurmountable odds. It worked on the principle that a man with no hope of escape will instinctively fight for his life with the ferocity of a cornered beast, and in so doing become an unbeatable warrior. As one of the few seasoned generals the Koreans had, and as a literate man, Sin would have known of this tradition from the military classics and ancient histories of China. He would have known that in certain desperate situations, the strategy called "fighting with a river to one's back" was sometimes the only option a general had.

One of the earliest recorded examples of "fighting with a river to one's back" occurred in the second century B.C., when the Han Chinese commander Han Hsin positioned his troops in the bottom of a gorge with their backs to a river to meet the opposing army of the Chao. With no possibility of retreat, his men were forced to fight for their lives, and in the end won a great victory. After the battle, Han's officers asked him to explain his unusual strategy, observing that in *The Art of War* Sun Tzu clearly stated that battles should be fought with hills behind and water in front.

"This is in *The Art of War* too," replied Han Hsin. "It is just that you have failed to notice it! Does it not say in *The Art of War*: 'Drive them into a fatal position and they will come out alive; place them in a hopeless spot and they will survive? Moreover, I did not have at my disposal troops that I had trained and led from past times, but was forced, as the saying goes, to round up men from the market place and use them to fight with. Under such circumstances, if I had not placed them in a desperate situation where each man was obliged to fight for his own life, but had allowed them to remain in a safe place, they would have all run away. Then what good would they have been to me?'"⁷⁾

7) Burton Watson, trans., *Records of the Grand Historian of China. Translated from the Shih chi of Ssu-ma chien* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), vol. 1, p. 217. ("Grand Historian" Ssu-ma ch'ien (c.145-c.90 B.C.) was the first major Chinese historian whose work has survived until today.)

General Sin Ip was in a similar situation. His force consisted for the most part of green troops and drafted peasants, poorly armed and terrified and apt to run when the fighting began. And yet a victory had to be won. The alternative was unthinkable, for beyond Chungju nothing stood between the Japanese and Seoul. The coming battle would therefore have to be a do-or-die struggle, and General Sin positioned his forces to achieve that end. At Tangumdae. With a river to their backs and no avenue of retreat, they would not be able to break and run as General Yi Il had reported his own men had done from the hills behind Sangju. With the cavalry leading the way and the mass of untrained recruits forced to fight for their lives, Sin's rabble might just be able to stop the Japanese advance.

The Japanese traversed Choryong Pass and began marching down towards Chungju late in the evening of June 5. They had learned by this time from a captured Korean that a sizable army lay ahead. After passing the night a few kilometers south of the city, Konishi Yukinaga separated his force into three main groups, central, left, and right. Then, with musketeers at the front and swordsmen and spearmen to the rear, they advanced on the Koreans crowded in a mass at Tangumdae. Flying lead instantly decimated General Sin's disorganized army, sowing panic in the ranks and sparking a retreat. Sin managed to lead his cavalry forward in a single desperate charge, but musket fire stopped his mounted warriors before they could break the enemy lines. Soon the ground was littered with bloodied Koreans and writhing horses, and the future of warfare was made clear to Sin Ip. Had the battle been fought at close quarters with traditional weapons, like Han Hsin's second century B.C. stand against the Chao, Sin and his men might have prevailed with their swords and flails and arrows and spears. But against muskets they had no chance at all. When the day was done General Sin and his army of eight thousand had ceased to exist, and the strategy of "fighting with a river to one's back" had been proven invalid in the face of technological change.⁸⁾

After coming together briefly at Chungju, Konishi's first contingent and Kato Kiyomasa's second separated again for the push to Seoul. Konishi again was the first to arrive. His forces reached Tongdaemun, the East Gate, in the early hours of June 12; Kato reached Namdaemun, the South Gate, a few hours behind. They entered the city to find it deserted. Soldiers and civilians had fled. King Sonjo and his government had evacuated as well.

The Japanese rested in Seoul for the next two weeks as additional units arrived in the south. Then they resumed their inexorable advance. They crossed the Imjin River in early July, scattering a 10,000-man army under Commander-in-Chief

8) *Sonjo sujong sillok*, vol. 3, pp. 238-239, 4/Sonjo 25 (May/June 1592). Sin Ip managed to spur his horse away from the battle. He drowned himself in a nearby spring to atone for the loss. Two of his officers followed suit. *Sonjo sillok*, vol. 5, p. 202, 27/4/Sonjo 25 (June 6, 1592.)

Kim Myong-won. By the end of the month they had taken Pyongyang. Kato Kiyomasa in the meantime led his second contingent into Korea's far northeast, traversing 1,000 kilometers from Pusan and at one point crossing into Manchuria, ostensibly to test the fighting prowess of the Jurchen.

But that was as far as the Japanese got.

In August 1592, China decided to send military assistance to Korea. King Sonjo and his government, now based at Uiju on the Yalu River, had initially been reticent to ask their suzerain for help, for it would mean relinquishing control of their own affairs to Ming commanders and officials. There was also the burden to consider of feeding Ming troops once they arrived in Korea, a drain that would leave that much less for the maintenance of the nation's own troops. The continuing Japanese advance, however, left the government no other option: without significant help from China, it seemed their kingdom would be swallowed up whole.

The Chinese for their part were initially confused, for it was not immediately clear what was happening in Korea. Had an invasion occurred as the Koreans were reporting? Or was Seoul overreacting to a larger than usual pirate raid, the sort that had plagued both countries for centuries past? After this was cleared up, there arose the suspicion that the Koreans were secretly in league with Hideyoshi. How else could one account for the rapidity of the Japanese advance? Eventually trust was restored, and the decision to send help was made. It would be limited help to start, for with a Mongol uprising to contend with in the north, few troops were available to dispatch east to Korea. The initial expeditionary force thus amounted to only 5,000 men, led by a supremely confident general named Zhao Chengxun. When he arrived at Uiju and heard firsthand of the power of the Japanese, General Zhao assured the Koreans that, "To me...the Japanese robber army will be but a group of ants and wasps. They will soon be scattered to the four winds."⁹⁾

General Zhao arrived at Pyongyang with his army in a pouring rain near dawn on August 23. The darkness and weather had masked their approach; the Japanese inside the city were caught completely off guard. Deciding to make the most of this, Zhao sent his men charging at the undefended Chilsongmun, the Seven Stars Gate, and got his army inside the city before the startled Japanese could mount a defense. What followed began for Konishi's men as a fight for their lives. They soon realized, however, that the attacking Ming army was in fact quite small. They thus started falling back and spreading out, encouraging the Chinese to split up and chase them down the city's narrow streets. When Zhao's concentrated attack had been dispersed in this manner, the Japanese then turned to counterattack. The

9) Yu Song-nyong, p. 125; Yoshi S. Kuno, *Japanese Expansion on the Asiatic Continent* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1937), vol. 1, p. 156; Hulbert, vol. 1, p. 400.

Chinese, badly outnumbered and facing increasingly disciplined musket fire, were soon sent fleeing back towards the Seven Stars Gate and along the road to the north.¹⁰⁾

With it now evident that Hideyoshi posed a threat to China itself, Beijing at last decided to send an army of considerable size to Korea. Thirty-five thousand men were raised and placed under General Li Rusong, recently returned to Beijing after distinguished service fighting the Mongols. Li would lead his force across the Yalu River and enter the Imjin War in late January of 1593.

In the meantime the Japanese were becoming bogged down in Korea. In order to continue their northward advance, reinforcements and supplies had to be amassed at Pyongyang. The plan had been to transport these by ship north via the Yellow Sea. When Japanese ships began probing west from Pusan in June, however, searching out a route through the myriad islands and channels, they ran into Korea's diminutive navy under the command of Yi Sun-sin. In a series of campaigns Yi called "Slaughter Operations," he destroyed 200 Japanese vessels at a cost of not even one of his 50 warships. Yi's fleet proved so dominant throughout the summer of 1592 that in October he led it straight into the lion's den, attacking the bulk of the Japanese navy anchored at Pusan, an astounding conglomeration of 500 ships. The Japanese, no longer eager to fight the Koreans at sea, left their vessels and took cover on land, where they tried in vain to drive off Yi's force with musket fire. Their bullets, so effective against human flesh, were useless against the thick sides of Yi's ships. By the end of the day 130 more Japanese ships had been burnt or otherwise sent to the bottom.¹¹⁾

The Koreans were so effective against the Japanese at sea because they had stronger, better-armed ships. The mainstay of Yi Sun-sin's navy was the *panokson*, or board-roofed ship, a stoutly built vessel, powered mainly by oars, with an additional deck to separate the oarsmen below from the fighting men above. It was much heavier than anything the Japanese possessed, and was armed with cannons, whereas the Japanese had none. Admiral Yi also had a vessel called a *kobukson*, or turtle ship, a floating tank of a ship like the *panokson*, with the top fighting deck covered with a spiked roof resembling the shell of a turtle. He did not have many: just one in the early months of the war, and later no more than three to five. The

10) *Sonjo sillok*, vol. 6, p. 35, 20/7/Sonjo 25 (Aug. 26, 1592); Yu Song-nyong, pp. 124-126; Turnbull, pp. 135-136.

11) Yi Sun-sin's war diary and battle reports to the government are available in English translation: Ha Tae-hung, trans., and Sohn, Pow-key, ed., *Nanjung Ilgi. War Diary of Admiral Yi Sun-sin* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1977); Ha Tae-hung, trans., and Sohn, Pow-key, ed., *Imjin Changch'o. Admiral Yi Sun-sin's Memorials to Court* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1981).

kobukson was so impervious to Japanese attack that it could be sculled into the midst of vastly superior enemy numbers to level cannon broadsides from point blank range.

While Yi Sun-sin's navy was attacking the Japanese at sea, Korean resistance to the invasion was building up inland as well. Two separate groups began to emerge in the summer of 1592: the *uibyong*, or "Righteous Armies" of civilian volunteers, and the monk-soldiers, answering a call to arms from the revered Buddhist leader Hyujong. These two groups, together with units of government soldiers, would with their harrying attacks force the Japanese back into the strongholds along their initial line of march, depriving them of freedom of movement, and making it increasingly difficult for them to find food.

One of the most famous of these guerrilla leaders was an upper-class scholar known as Kwak Jae-u, the "Red Coat General," who raised and outfitted with his own money a small army in the southeast province of Kyongsang. He was known as the "Red Coat General" ostensibly because he wore a coat dyed in the first menstrual blood of young girls, which he believed suffused the garment with *yin* energy that would repel the *yang* energy of Japanese bullets. It evidently served him well. Kwak would die of old age long after the war.

On February 5, 1593, an army of nearly 60,000 Chinese and Koreans arrived at Pyongyang, the northernmost point of the stalled Japanese advance. Hyujong's monk-soldiers were the first into the fight, attacking a Japanese unit holding Moranbong Hill commanding the approaches to the city. It took two days and nights, but they achieved their objective, at a cost of 600 men. Then, early on the morning of February 8, Pyongyang itself was surrounded and the main attack launched. The allied army, so much larger than the Japanese force holed up inside, overwhelmed the outer defenses and stormed over the walls. But Konishi's forces were not yet done. They fell back inside a fortification previously constructed in the center of the city, and gave every indication of intending to fight on.

With his losses mounting, Li Rusong signaled for his troops to withdraw. In the lull that followed he sent a message in to Konishi. "My army is sufficient to annihilate you," it said. "But I don't not want to kill so many. I will therefore leave a way open for you to withdraw."¹² It was an offer Konishi could not refuse. He had already lost more than 2,000 men, and could not afford to lose any more. He accepted the offer and retreated from Pyongyang to Seoul. General Li gathered his army and followed ponderously behind.

Li had just crossed the Imjin River when he ran into unexpected resistance: the sixth contingent of the Japanese army under Kobayakawa Takakage, encamped

12) *Sonjo sillok*, 11/1/Sonjo 26 (Feb. 11, 1593); Sin Kyong, *Chaejo bonbangji*, in Yi Nae-ok et. al., p. 161.

at Pyokje, fifteen kilometers north of Seoul. Kobayakawa, the oldest of Hideyoshi's commanders serving in Korea, had ignored the entreaties of his comrades to fall back inside the city walls. "You have always been under Hideyoshi, who has been ever victorious," he said. "You know nothing of defeat, and consequently nothing of how to turn defeat into victory. But that's an old experience with me, so leave it in my hands.... Unless it is a life-and-death fight, these fellows won't be cowed. We have gone back far enough. Now is the time to seek life in the midst of death."¹³)

In the Battle of Pyokje on February 27, old Kobayakawa was nearly as good as his boast. With 20,000 men plus reinforcements sent up from Seoul, he crushed the advancing Chinese army in an epic clash involving 61,000 combatants. With such a mass of humanity crowded into the narrow valley, there was not enough room for the Japanese to employ their musketeers to full effect. And with the mud that was soon stirred up, the Chinese cavalry were forced to dismount. The outcome of the battle was determined instead by hand to hand fighting, the straight, double-edged Chinese sword against the gently curving, single-edged Japanese *katana*, sharp enough to cut through bone. Li Rusong's forces in the end were forced to retreat, leaving behind, by one estimate, 10,000 dead.¹⁴)

Seoul by this point was a smoldering ghost town, with hundreds of corpses lying unattended in the streets. In the early hours of February 24, local citizens had started fires in an attempt to assist with what they hoped was their imminent liberation. The Japanese garrisoning the city had responded with terrible ferocity. Prior to marching north to join Kobayakawa, they massacred every Korean man they could lay their hands on, and burned large areas of the city.¹⁵) Returning to this scene of death and devastation, the elation the victors of Pyokje felt could not have lasted long. The Chinese, after all, would almost certainly be back.

And in the meantime Korean resistance was growing. Indeed, although the Ming army had retired to Pyongyang, the Japanese in Seoul were now surrounded by hostile Korean forces: government troops and civilian volunteers at the Imjin River, Paju, and Haeyu Pass to the north; monk-soldier at Surak-san to the northeast, Chasong to the west, and Ichon to the south.¹⁶) And at Haengju to the

13) James Murdoch, *A History of Japan During the Century of Early Foreign Intercourse (1542-1651)*, (Kobe, Japan: published at the office of the "Chronicle," 1903), p. 345.

14) Yu Song-nyong, pp. 163-164; *Sonjo sillok*, 5/2/Sonjo 26 (Mar. 7, 1593); *Sonjo sujong sillok*, 1/Sonjo 26 (Feb. 1593); L. Carrington Goodrich, ed., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1976), vol. 1, pp. 833-834.

15) *Sonjo sujong sillok*, vol. 4, p. 9, 1/Sonjo 26 (Feb. 1593); Turnbull, p. 143.

16) Samuel Dukhae Kim, "The Korean Monk-Soldiers in the Imjin War: An Analysis of Buddhist Resistance to the Hideyoshi Invasion, 1592-1598" (unpublished PhD dissertation:

west lay the biggest thorn of all: 2,300 Koreans under Cholla Province army commander Kwon Yul, holed up in a wooden stockade on a bluff overlooking the Han River.

Kwon Yul was a fifty-five-year-old civil servant from a family of note in Andong in northern Kyongsang Province. Upon the outbreak of war in May 1592, he led a body of troops north in a failed attempt to halt the Japanese advance before it reached Seoul. He then returned south and participated in the defense of Cholla Province, which the sixth contingent of the Japanese army under Kobayakawa Takakage was threatening to overrun. Kwon distinguished himself by defeating Japanese units in two engagements, the Battles of Ungchi and Ichi, in the second week of August. Recognizing his ability, the government appointed him Army Commander of Cholla Province in the following month.

Early in 1593 Kwon Yul led a small army north to Seoul in preparation for the anticipated allied offensive. Incorporating a unit of monk-soldiers under the priest Choyong into his ranks, he set to work strengthening a dilapidated fortress ten kilometers west of the capital, on a hill outside the village of Haengju on the north bank of the Han River. It was a highly defensible position, protected at its rear by a steep drop-off down to the Han. If an attack came, it would have to be made uphill and from the north, straight into the Koreans' concentrated fire.

With the retreat of the Ming army, Kwon Yul's fortress at Haengju emerged as the greatest immediate threat to the Japanese in Seoul. On March 14 they decided to do something about it. Some hours before dawn, the west gate of the city opened and a long line of troops filed out and turned towards Haengju. The 2,300 Korean troops and monk-soldiers within Haengju fortress, crowded together with thousands of civilians who had fled their villages to seek shelter within the walls, watched the approach of this multitude with growing trepidation. When the Japanese arrived at the base of their hill at dawn, the Koreans observed that each soldier had a red-and-white banner affixed to his back, and that many wore masks carved with fierce depictions of animals and monsters and ghosts. Panic was now hovering just beneath the surface, held in check by the calm authority of Kwon Yul. As the Japanese busied themselves below with their pre-battle preparations, he ordered his men to have a meal. There would be no telling when they would have a chance to eat again.

The battle began shortly after dawn. The Japanese, so numerous that they could not all rush at the ramparts at once, divided into groups to take turns in the assault. Their strength must have seemed overwhelming to the Koreans. For once, however, the muskets of the Japanese were of only limited use, for in having to fire uphill they were unable to effectively target the defenders holed up within. The

advantage was with the Koreans, firing down upon the attacking Japanese with arrows and stones. They had a number of gunpowder weapons as well, including several large cannons and a rank of *hwacha* ("fire carts"), box-shaped devices built onto wagons that fired up to one hundred gunpowder-propelled arrows in a single devastating barrage. Alongside these more traditional weapons was an oddity that employed a spinning wheel mechanism to hurl a fusillade of stones. It was called the *sucha sokpo*, the "water-wheel rock cannon."

Konishi Yukinaga's group led off the Japanese assault. Kwon Yul waited until they were within range, then beat his commander's drum three times to signal the attack. Every Korean weapon was fired at once, bows, cannons, *hwacha*, and rock cannons, raking Konishi's ranks and driving his men back. Ishida Mitsunari was the next to attack. His force too was driven back, and Ishida himself was injured. Third contingent leader Kuroda Nagamasa followed and likewise failed.

The Japanese had now attacked Haengju three times, and had not even penetrated the fortress's outer palisade of stakes. Young Ukita Hideie, determined to make a breakthrough in his, the fourth charge, managed to smash a hole in the obstacle and got near the inner wall. Then he was wounded and had to fall back, leaving a trail of casualties behind. The next unit to attack, Kikkawa Hiroie's, poured through the gap Ukita's forces had opened, and was soon attacking Haengju's inner wall, the last line of defense between the Japanese and Kwon Yul's troops. The fighting now went hand-to-hand, with masked warriors attempting to slash their way past the defenders lining the barricades, while the Koreans fought back with everything they had — swords, spears, arrows, stones, boiling water, even handfuls of ashes thrown into the attackers' eyes. As the fighting reached its peak no sound came from Kwon Yul's drum. The Korean commander had abandoned drumstick and tradition in favor of his sword, and was now fighting alongside his men. At one point the Japanese heaped dried grass along the base of Haengju's log walls and tried to set the place ablaze. The Koreans doused the flames with water before they could take hold. In the seventh attack led by Kobayakawa Takakage, the Japanese knocked down some of the log pilings and opened a hole in the fortress's inner wall. The Koreans managed to hold them back long enough for the logs to be repositioned.

As the afternoon wore on the Korean defenders grew exhausted, and their supply of arrows dwindled dangerously low. The women within the fort are said to have gathered stones in their wide skirts to re-supply the men along the walls. This traditional type of skirt is still known as a *Haengju chima* ("Haengju skirt") in remembrance of this day. But stones alone were not enough to repel the Japanese for long. Then, when all seemed lost, Korean naval commander Yi Bun arrived on the Han River at the rear of the fortress with two ships laden with ten thousand

arrows. With these the defenders of Haengju were able to continue the fight until sundown, successfully repelling an eighth attack, then a ninth.

Finally, towards sunset, the attack was called off. The Japanese had suffered too many casualties to continue. They had in fact been dealt a terrible defeat, the most serious loss on land so far at the hands of the Koreans. Throughout the evening the survivors gathered up what bodies they could, heaped them into piles, and set them alight. Then they turned around and walked back to Seoul. One Japanese officer in the disheartened assembly would later liken the scene beside the Han that day to the *sanzu no kawa*, the "River of Hell." When they were gone, Kwon Yul's men came out and recovered those bodies that the Japanese had been unable to retrieve, cut them into pieces, and hung them from the walls of their fort.¹⁷⁾

In Pyongyang, meanwhile, Chinese general Li Rusong was ignoring Korean entreaties to march towards Seoul a second time and destroy the Japanese once and for all. He had already fought Hideyoshi's army twice and suffered heavy losses both times, and was not eager to risk a third, possibly catastrophic engagement. He decided to talk them out of the capital instead, through Ming negotiator Shen Weijing. The Japanese were only too willing to parlay: their supplies were getting desperately low, and retreat had become their only practical option. With tensions rising between the Chinese and the Koreans — who vehemently opposed negotiation with the enemy, and in any case were allowed no part in the process — Shen Weijing hammered out a settlement and the Japanese agreed to withdraw. On the morning of May 19, 1593, they filed out of the capital and began a leisurely march back to the south.

By mid-summer of 1593 the Japanese were confined to an 80-kilometer-long chain of fortresses around Pusan. The Koreans continued to urge the Chinese to attack them and drive them into the sea. The Chinese for their part continued to demure. After the losses they had suffered at Pyongyang and Pyokje, and with the Japanese no longer posing a threat to Beijing, they were now committed to ending the war through negotiation. The Japanese were equally willing to talk; to see what face-saving concessions could be pried out of the Chinese for presentation to Hideyoshi.

17) *Sonjo sujong sillok*, vol. 4, p. 14, 2/Sonjo 26 (March 1593); Sin Kyong, pp. 170-171; Kang Song-mun, "Haengju daechop-eso-ui Kwon Yul chonnyak-gwa chonsul," in Chang Chong-dok and Pak Jae-gwang, eds., *Imjin waeran-gwa Kwon Yul changgun* (Seoul: Chonjaeng kinyomgwon, 1999), pp. 110-113. The Battle of Haengju, together with Yi Sun-sin's triumph in the Battle of Hansan-do and Kim Sin-min's victory in the First Battle of Chinju, are known in Korea as the *sam daechop*, the "three great victories," won by Koreans in the Imjin War.

By mutual consent the fighting thus died down for nearly three years, but only after the Koreans had been dealt a final, terrible blow. In July 1593 the Japanese marched on the southern city of Chinju to seek revenge for their defeat there the previous November, when the city's garrison under Kim Si-min had held out against a force four times its size. This time Hideyoshi's commanders returned with an army usually cited as numbering 93,000.¹⁸⁾ They would be faced by between 3,000 and 4,000 Koreans under such notables as Chungchong army commander Hwang Jin, Kyongsang army commander Choi Kyong-hoe; and government-official-turned-guerrilla leader Kim Chon-il who assumed overall command, much to the aggravation of city magistrate Seo Ye-won. There was no way this small group of defenders could stand against such overwhelming numbers, the largest single enemy force so far assembled in the war. "Red Coat General" Kwak Jae-u saw this clearly, and urged his friend Hwang Jin not to throw his life away trying to defend the place. Hwang agreed that Chinju was probably doomed. He had already given his word to Kim Chon-il and others, however, that he would stay and fight. As Kwak Jae-u rode sadly away, knowing he would never see Hwang again, the defenders of Chinju raced to stockpile food and arms in preparation for the coming fight. Then the gates of the city were closed and barred.¹⁹⁾

In the second week of July a tidal wave of Japanese troops began marching west from the chain of forts encircling Pusan, burning and looting as they went. The ferocity of the advance drove thousands of terrified civilians to join the defenders holed up inside the city. By the nineteenth Chinju was surrounded "in a hundred layers," and looked like "a small, lonely boat in the middle of a sea." The assault began the following day, foot soldiers peppering the ramparts with musket fire, keeping the Koreans down while their comrades filled in portions of the moat that had previously been dug outside the north wall. With this obstacle overcome, a unit of sappers advanced to the wall itself and began prying stones out from the base. The effort came to an abrupt halt when a cascade of stones fell down on them, killing some and driving the rest back.

The fighting continued day and night from July 21 to 24, the Japanese taking turns assaulting the ramparts and removing stones from the walls, keeping up an unrelenting pressure on the Korean defenses. Then, around the twenty-fifth, it started to rain. It began for the Koreans as a welcome relief, for they were able to snatch a little rest when the Japanese, unwilling or unable to use their muskets in the wet, were forced to call off their assault. (By the late sixteenth century the

18) This figure of 93,000, which is the one commonly quoted in accounts of the battle, is taken from Japanese sources, and may be too high. According to *Sonjo sujong sillok*, the attacking Japanese army totaled only 30,000. (vol. 4, p. 24, 6/Sonjo 26 (July 1593).

19) Sin Kyong, p. 179.

Japanese had invented a cover for their arquebuses that allowed them to fire them in the rain, but it was an imperfect solution for keeping a taper lit and powder dry.) The downpour, however, soon turned into a curse, for it began washing away the soil at the damaged portions of the walls, weakening them further.

During the respite the Japanese sent a message into the beleaguered city demanding its surrender. "The Chinese have already given up," it read. "Why do you dare continue to resist?" Korean commander Kim Chon-il sent a reply flying back over the walls: "Three hundred thousand Chinese soldiers have been sent to help us. When they arrive you will all be destroyed." The Japanese scoffed at this bravado, hoisting their trouser legs above the knee and miming effeminate Chinese officials running away.²⁰

From his camp outside the city, Kato Kiyomasa was making preparations for a renewed attempt to undermine the walls. This time he had his men fashion four *kame-no-kosha*, or "turtle wagons," heavily built carts with stout wooden roofs. These crude vehicles were wheeled up to the base of the walls, and parties of men went to work with crowbars on the lower courses of stones, prying them out one by one. The Koreans could see what was happening below, but were unable to stop it, their arrows and musket balls and stones bouncing harmlessly off the roofs of the wagons. Someone finally had the idea of dropping oil-soaked cotton down onto the contraptions and setting them alight. Kato, perceiving the weakness, promptly ordered more carts built, this time with fire-retardant ox hides nailed to the roof.²¹

While this was going on, Japanese forces were applying pressure at many other spots all around the city. Elevated firing platforms were erected in front of the east and west gates, and a bamboo palisade was constructed along one side, allowing Kato's musketeers to take up positions close to the walls. Inside the city, Hwang Jin, Kim Chon-il, and Kimhae magistrate Yi Chong-in fought desperately to repel these various advances, but their men were growing exhausted. During a lull in the fighting Hwang Jin leaned over the wall to assess the situation. "The trench out there is full of enemy dead," he observed. "There must be more than a thousand..." At that moment a Japanese soldier hiding at the base of the wall aimed his musket straight up at Hwang's exposed head and fired, sending a ball clean through the Chungchong Army Commander's helmet and into his skull.

On July 27 the repeated forays by the Japanese to pry stones away from the fortifications succeeded in collapsing a portion of the wall. For the Koreans sheltering inside the end had come. They cried out to Kim Chon-il: "Commander!

20) *Sonjo sujong sillok*, vol. 4, pp. 26-27, 6/Sonjo 26 (July 1593).

21) William Griffis, *Corea. The Hermit Kingdom* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894), p. 125; W. G. Aston, *Hideyoshi's Invasion of Korea* (Tokyo: Ryubun-kwan, 1907), p. 36; Turnbull, pp. 158-159.

The enemy has breached the walls! What should we do?" There was nothing that Kim could tell them. He did not have enough men to resist the Japanese troops now pouring into the city, everyone was exhausted after a week of battle, every arrow had been fired, every stone had been thrown. And now there was no way to escape. Those who chose to die fighting did so with swords and spears and bamboo staves, no match for the muskets and swords of the Japanese. The rest abandoned their positions and raced from one wall to the other, searching in vain for a way to get out. As the Japanese proceeded to tear the city to pieces, Kim Chon-il and his eldest son Kim Sang-gon, accompanied by army commander Choi Kyong-hoe, guerrilla leader Ko Chong-hu, and a few others, retreated to the Choksongnu pavilion on the south wall of the city overlooking the Nam River. After bowing to the north, towards the capital and their king, the men embraced and, with tears streaming down their faces, bid one another farewell. Then they joined hands and threw themselves into the water below.

Yi Chong-in continued to resist until the bitter end, fighting off the attacking Japanese in a rearguard action that took him onto the rocks at the edge of the Nam River. Here he is reported to have seized two Japanese soldiers in his arms and shouted: "Kimhae Magistrate Yi Chong-in is dying here!" He then cast himself into the water, carrying the two soldiers down with him.

At least 60,000 Koreans lost their lives in the Second Battle of Chinju. Most were killed in the massacre that followed the taking of the city, an orgy of destruction that has been called the worst atrocity of the war.²²⁾ The Japanese under Kato, Ukita, and Konishi had no mercy. They did not leave a cow or dog or chicken alive. In a frenzy of revenge against a nation that refused to be conquered, they pulled down the walls and burned all the buildings. They filled the wells with stones. They cut down every tree. When the destruction was finished, Chinju ceased to exist. Since the beginning of the war, the Korean annals would later record, no other place had been so thoroughly destroyed—nor had loyalty and righteousness been so magnificently displayed.²³⁾

The negotiations between China and Japan, meanwhile, were degenerating into fiasco. To keep the game alive and secure a settlement, Hideyoshi's envoys altered

22) James Palais, *Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), p. 83.

23) This account of the second battle of Chinju is based mainly on: *Sonjo sujong sillok*, vol. 4, pp. 26-29, 6/Sonjo 26 (July 1593); *Sonjo sillok*, vol. 9, pp. 61-64, 167/Sonjo 26 (Aug. 12, 1593); Yu Song-nyong, pp. 187-190; Sin Kyong, p. 177-180; Hong Yang-ho, *Haedongmyong jangjin*, in Yi Nae-ok et.al., pp. 186-187. According to the Japanese account in the *Taikoki*, 25,000 Koreans were killed in the battle. Most of these "fell from the cliffs and were drowned." (Tumbull, p. 160.)

his demands so profoundly that in the end Beijing was led to believe that all the would-be conqueror desired was to be accepted as a vassal of the Emperor of the Ming.

And so we arrive at Osaka Castle in the fall of 1596, where Hideyoshi is receiving the envoys sent from Beijing. His eager-to-please advisors have led him to believe that the Chinese have come to convey to him their government's subservience and contrition. The Chinese, conversely, believe they have come to make Hideyoshi subservient to China by proclaiming him a vassal king. The charade finally ended when Hideyoshi had one of his scholar-monks translate the edict the Chinese had brought. "You, Toyotomi Hideyoshi," the document concluded, "are...instructed reverently to conform with the imperial desire and to maintain your everlasting existence by...cheerfully obeying our imperial command!"²⁴⁾

Hideyoshi reportedly flew into a rage. He ripped off the silk robe presented to him by the Chinese; he tore the crown off his head and dashed it to the ground. The Ming envoys were sent packing, in fear for their lives. The second invasion of Korea would be the result.

The second invasion of Korea, called *chongyu jaeran* by the Koreans, the invasion of the fire-rooster year, unfolded more slowly and methodically than the first. Troop movements began in March of 1597 and continued on into the summer, until 141,490 soldiers were encamped in the south. Then they waited. They would not march inland until September, when Korean fields would be ready to harvest and a sufficient supply of rice assured. By September, moreover, the Korean navy would be virtually destroyed, removing from southern waters the impediment that had so hampered the first invasion.

During the years between the two invasions, the reputation of Korean naval commander Yi Sun-sin had been tarnished by accusations that he disobeyed orders and was unwilling to fight. A good deal of the trouble stemmed from Yi's own mastery of naval warfare: after his stunning successes in the opening months of the war, the government came to expect victories from him as a matter of course, victories he could no longer deliver once the Japanese began avoiding engagements and hiding their ships. The Korean government appears not to have understood this fundamental dilemma. Spurred on by scurrilous reports from Won Kyun, commander of the defunct Kyongsang Right Navy and an arch-rival of Yi's from the start of the war, the government began pressing Yi to attack an enemy that was no longer there. When Yi failed to comply, he was accused of disobeying orders. Finally, in March of 1597, he was dismissed from office and ordered to Seoul to

24) Imperial patent of investiture from the Wanli emperor to Toyotomi Hideyoshi, in Kuno, vol. 1, pp. 335-336.

face trial. After a month in prison and interrogations that likely involved torture, the death sentence hanging over Yi's head was commuted to loss of position alone. He was released on May 16 and sent south under guard to serve as a common soldier in the army of Kwon Yul, recently appointed Korea's Commander-in-Chief.

On June 26 Yi Sun-sin consulted the Book of Divination to discover what the future held for his rival Won Kyun, who had replaced him as supreme naval commander. "The first sign," he recorded in his diary that day, "came out as 'water, thunder, and great disaster.' This means that the Heavenly wind will corrupt and destroy the original body. It is a very bad omen."²⁵

Two months later, on August 20, 1597, Won Kyun, forced into battle by orders sent down from Seoul, led the Korean navy in a mismanaged attack on the Japanese navy at Pusan. His ships were easily beaten back, and retreated to Chilchon Strait on the northern coast of Koje Island. One week later the Japanese counter-attacked, annihilating the Korean navy and killing Won Kyun. When the news reached Seoul, Yi Sun-sin was hastily re-appointed. He would soon discover he had only thirteen ships left.

September 1597. The fields of Korea were ready to harvest. It was time for Hideyoshi's commanders to launch their second offensive. They moved inland in two great armies, the "Army of the Left" swinging west then north into Cholla Province, the "Army of the Right" taking a north and then westerly course. The first objective was the town of Namwon, where 3,000 Chinese troops and 1,000 Koreans were garrisoned to block any northward enemy advance. The Left Army wiped them out in the last week of September, then proceeded to lay waste to the countryside around. Wandering about Namwon in the wake of the battle, the priest Keinen, who was serving with the Japanese army as a physician and chaplain, recorded in his diary that "the only people to be seen were those lying dead on the ground. When I looked around the fortress at dawn the next day I saw bodies beyond number heaped up along the roadside."²⁶ He would later encapsulate the trauma of the scene in a poem:

*Whoever sees this
Out of all his days
Today has become the rest of his life.²⁷*

This was just as Toyotomi Hideyoshi had wanted. His second invasion of

25) Diary entry for 12/5/Chongyu (June 26, 1597), Yi Sun-sin, *Nanjung ilgi*, p. 269.

26) Keinen, *Chosen nichūnichi kī*, quoted in Yang jae-suk, *Imjin waeran-un uri-ga igin chinjaeng iottda* (Seoul: Garam, 2001), pp. 324-325.

27) Quoted in Turnbull, p. 196.

Korea was more about saving face than conquest: he wanted to demonstrate to the Chinese that he did not fear them or feel subservient in any way. He also wanted to punish the Koreans for resisting him. In the first invasion he had had hopes of winning them over, and thus had ordered his troops to treat civilians well so long as they were compliant. There would be none of this in the second invasion. Hideyoshi wanted the Koreans killed, soldiers and civilians alike, and evidence of the slaughter sent back to him in Japan. It was not practical because of the distance to collect severed heads, the usual trophies of war. Hideyoshi's troops instead collected noses, possibly more than 100,000. These were submitted to nose collection stations set up across southern Korea for packing in salt in barrels and shipment back to Japan.²⁸⁾

While the Japanese army was cutting a swatch through Cholla Province and into Chungchong, the Japanese navy was advancing along the southern coast, confident that the way was now clear to the Yellow Sea. It was not. With a fleet of only thirteen ships, Yi Sun-sin was preparing to make a stand in Myongnyang Strait, the gateway to the Yellow Sea between Chin Island and the mainland on the extreme southwestern tip of the Korean peninsula. On the eve of what would be the most astonishing battle of the war, he gathered his commanders and said: "According to the principles of strategy, 'He who seeks his death shall live, he who seeks his life shall die.' Again, the strategy says, 'If one defender stands on watch at a strong gateway he may drive terror deep into the heart of the enemy coming by the ten thousand.' These are golden sayings for us. You captains are expected to strictly obey my orders. If you do not, even the least error shall not be pardoned, but shall be severely punished by martial law."²⁹⁾

On October 26, in the Battle of Myongnyang Strait, thirteen Korean ships stood against an enemy fleet of at least 130 vessels — and won. By the end of the day, 31 Japanese ships had been destroyed without a single Korean vessel being lost. After that Hideyoshi's navy fell back towards Pusan and did not venture west again. This stunning victory would mark the pinnacle of Yi Sun-sin's naval career, the point where his leadership rose from the extraordinary to the sublime, and from there entered into legend. In the centuries that followed, no one would praise him more than his former enemy, the Japanese themselves. At a party honoring Togo Heihachiro's victory over Russia's Baltic fleet in 1905, for example, Togo took exception to one eulogy comparing him to Lord Horatio Nelson and Yi Sun-sin. "It may be proper to compare me with Nelson," he said, "but not with Korea's Yi

28) Receipts were issued for every cache of noses Japanese commanders submitted to "nose collection stations." More than twenty of these "nose receipts" are reproduced in Cho Chung-hwa, *Tashi ssunun imjin waeran-sa* (Seoul: Hakmin-sa, 1996), pp. 116-125.

29) Diary entry for 15/9/Chongyu (Oct. 25, 1597), Yi Sun-sin, *Nanjung ilgi*, p. 311.

Sun-sin. He is too great to be compared to anyone."³⁰)

The furthest north the Japanese advanced in 1597 was to within seventy kilometers of Seoul. Here, at the Battle of Chiksan, they clashed with an advance unit of Chinese troops. With it evident that the Chinese had returned to Korea, Hideyoshi's forces made no effort to hang on to the ground they had covered, leaving themselves exposed to counterattack with winter coming on. Instead they retreated south once more and established themselves again in a long chain of forts. The allied Chinese and Koreans soon hemmed them in, nowhere more so than at Ulsan, where forces under Kato Kiyomasa withstood a siege that saw many of his men starve and freeze to death. By reserving the bulk of the food and water for his crucially important musketeers, Kato was able to maintain an effective core of troops to repel the Chinese assault when it finally came. Similar defeats were inflicted on Ming forces later that year in October, when they tried to dislodge Konishi Yukinaga from his fort at Sunchon at the opposite end of the Japanese fortress chain, and Shimazu Yoshihiro from his Sachon stronghold at roughly the center.

After that the Chinese wanted nothing more of fighting. Word had recently been received of Hideyoshi's death in Kyoto on September 18, 1598, and it was evident that his army in Korea was preparing to leave. The Chinese, now under the supreme command of Yang Hao, thus ignored Korean urgings to attack, and instead gave the Japanese time and space to depart. This was easily done for Kato Kiyomasa and his colleagues at Ulsan, Pusan, Ungchon, and points between. On the western end of the fortress chain, however, Konishi Yukinaga at Sunchon was unable to leave: the allied Korean-Ming navy was blocking him in. The final clash came on December 16, when a fleet from Shimazu Yoshihiro's neighboring Sachon enclave sailed west to attack the blockade. In the ensuing Battle of Noryang Strait, at least 200 of Shimazu's ships were destroyed and an "uncountable number" of his men were killed or drowned. For the Koreans, however, the victory was costly: they lost naval commander Yi Sun-sin. He was felled by a stray bullet in the chest while pursuing the retreating enemy fleet back towards Pusan. His last words, spoken to his eldest son and nephew, were: "Don't let the men know...." Struggling to maintain their composure, the two young men carried their commander's body into his cabin before the calamity could be noticed. It was only after the battle was won that word of Yi's death was allowed to spread through the fleet.³¹)

30) Kim Tae-chun, "Yi Sun-sin's Fame in Japan," *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, no. 47 (June 1978), p. 95.

31) Yi Pun, "Biography of Admiral Yi Sun-sin," in Yi Sun-sin, *Imjin changch'o*, pp. 237-238; Yu Song-nyong, p. 225; *Sonjo sujong sillok*, vol. 4, pp. 159-160, 11/Sonjo 31 (Dec. 1598); *Sonjo sillok*, vol. 25, pp. 187-188, 27/11/Sonjo 31 (Dec. 24, 1598); Park Yume-hee, *Admiral*

By then Konishi's forces had got cleanly away. There was talk amongst the Chinese of marching on the exposed heart of the enemy perimeter at Pusan. Before any serious movement was made, however, the Japanese there had evacuated as well. The last of their ships departed on December 24, 1598, bringing to an end the seven-year-long war.

Hideyoshi's invasion of Korea clearly ended in failure. His troops took back to Japan a long list of spoils: thousands of books, scrolls and paintings, religious artifacts, stone pagodas, movable type invented in Korea two centuries before — and 50,000 slaves or more, including potters with advanced skills the Japanese lacked. But it was scant compensation for the 70,000 or 80,000 soldiers that die d.³²⁾

Chinese casualties easily ran into the tens of thousands as well. For Beijing, however, the impact on its treasury would be the more serious loss. According to one estimate, between 20 and 26 million *taels* of silver were spent to sent expeditionary forces to Korea to counter the first and second invasions, in weight of metal nearly one thousand metric tons.³³⁾ This expenditure would substantially weaken the Ming government at the very time when a serious threat to its existence was emerging, the rise of Jurchen power on its eastern frontier. These Jurchen, soon to be renamed Manchus, would capture Beijing in 1644 and replace the Ming with a dynasty of their own, the Qing.

But of course it was Korea that suffered the most in the war. Its economy was shattered. Towns and cities were destroyed. And Koreans died in uncountable numbers. Soldiers and civilians who were killed outright, who starved to death in famines, and who died in the epidemics brought about by the war, conceivably totaled two million or more, roughly twenty percent of the kingdom's entire population.³⁴⁾

And what became of those severed Korean noses sent back to Japan? They were buried in a mound later misnamed the *mimizuka* ("ear mound"), in front of

Yi Sun-shin and His Turtleboat Armada (Seoul: Hanjin, 1978) pp. 243-246; Jho Sung-do, *Yi Sun-shin. A National Hero of Korea* (Chinhae: Choongmoo-kong Society, 1970), pp. 224-228; Yang Jae-suk, pp. 259-262.

- 32) It is from these spoils of war that the Japanese would derive such names for Hideyoshi's Korean invasion as "The War of Abduction," "The Pottery War," and "The War of Celadon and Metal Type."
- 33) Edwin O. Reischauer and John K. Fairbanks, *East Asia: The Great Tradition* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), pp. 332-333. (1 *tael* = 1.3 ounces, or 36.855 grams.)
- 34) These figures are suggested by Tony Michell, "Fact and Hypothesis in Yi Dynasty Economic History: The Demographic Dimension," *Korean Studies Forum*, no. 6 (Winter-Spring 1979/1980), pp. 77-79. By way of comparison, some one million Korean civilians died as a result of the Korean War of 1950-53.

Toyokuni Jinja, the shrine where Toyotomi Hideyoshi's spirit now resides. The mound remains there to this day, tucked between a playground and an alley. It is not marked on many city maps. Few tourists to Kyoto ever visit the place.